



# CARY GRANT

## *an appreciation*

Cary Grant's screen career gave style

a new meaning. Ken Ferguson pays

tribute to one of Hollywood's most

popular stars. . .

**I**n over 70 movies made throughout his distinguished career, Cary Grant brought elegance and charisma. No matter what the setting: running from a crop dusting plane in *North by Northwest*; flirting with Grace Kelly in the plush Riviera setting of *To Catch A Thief*; arguing with Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby* or romancing Ingrid Bergman in *Indiscreet*, Cary Grant gave it style.

The news of his death at the age of 82 a few months ago brought a great sadness to so many of us, especially those who have followed his career closely. He seemed to be indestructible, a Peter Pan, destined for at least 100 birthdays.

The first time I interviewed Cary Grant was on the set of *The Grass Is Greener* (1960) at Shepperton Studios. We were chatting away in his portable dressing room when he suddenly opened a drawer and took out a telegram, which he handed to me. In the often-imitated, unmistakable voice which never lost its trace of an English accent, Cary said: "I want you to read this!" I did so, to myself. "No!" he exclaimed. "I want you to read it to me!" The words I read-out loud had been sent from Universal Pictures in Hollywood informing Cary that a film in which he starred with Tony Curtis, *Operation Petticoat*, had become the company's biggest-grosser of all time. "Now," he said. "Isn't that just wonderful!" his face lighting up with obvious delight.

I recall the incident vividly. It seemed so unlikely that I'd find myself reading Grant's telegram to him, but I put it down to the fact that even a star of his status needed to be reminded that he was such a big star. Grant was no exception to the insecurities which beset all actors. He loved the applause just like everyone else. And millions in return loved Cary. He epitomised what class, style, elegance and charm were all about.



He could also be something of a prima donna, argumentative and keen to have his way. In an earlier incident on the set of *Indiscreet* he and his partner and director of the production, Stanley Donen, were locked together in a row in one of their portable dressing rooms. Voices were raised. Co-star Ingrid Bergman knocked loudly on the door, went in, and within a few seconds seemed to have resolved the argument. She came out smiling, somewhat sheepishly, to the waiting assembly.

Cary Grant wasn't one of the world's greatest actors, but what he did was perfection of a unique kind. He did what he knew he was best at, only now and again risking his 'image' with a costume role, rather like the one he played in the miscast *The Pride And The Passion*. Cary was a 'lounge suit' star who would never take the chance of dressing up in cowboy gear for a Western. The secret of his success, and his enormous popularity all over the world, was that he gave us what we wanted to see and always what was expected of him.

We all have our favourite Cary Grant movies. Mine certainly are the four he and Alfred Hitchcock made together: *Suspicion*; *Notorious*; *To Catch A Thief* and *North By Northwest*. I once, jokingly, said to Hitchcock that he had a lot to thank Grant for the quality of those productions. Hitchcock, who rarely ever smiled during his interviews, kept a solemn expression on those familiar cherubic features and replied, seriously, "Oh no. Mr Grant has a lot to thank me for!"

Hitchcock and Grant had a marvellous rapport, but I wonder if Grant ever did find out that the inspiration for that long love scene he and Ingrid Bergman shared in *Notorious*, when they played one of the screen's longest embraces, stemmed from an incident Hitchcock had witnessed on a train journey from Boulogne to Paris. To refresh your memories of that particular sequence, when the telephone rings Grant and Bergman don't let go of each other. The camera follows, close in, as Cary answers it with Ingrid still in his arms.

Said Hitchcock, "The idea behind that embrace came to me on that train journey through France one Sunday. The train suddenly came to a stop. I was gazing out of the window when I saw a young man with a girl clinging to him against the wall of a factory. This young man was also urinating against the wall. But the girl never let go of him. He continued to look down to see how he was doing!"

Grant also had a wonderful working relationship with director Howard Hawks. Their five films: *Bringing Up Baby*; *Only Angels Have Wings*; *His Girl Friday*; *I Was A Male War Bride* and *Monkey Business* in which Grant starred with Marilyn Monroe and Ginger Rogers, beautifully captured the magic and supreme artistry the Bristol-born actor



With Hitchcock on location for *North by Northwest*

brought to the screen.

When Frank Sinatra handed Grant a special Oscar for his achievements in films in April 1970, Sinatra added his own tribute. "No one has brought more pleasure to more people for many years than Cary has, and nobody has done so many things so well," said Sinatra.

Grant was destined never to win an Oscar for any of his screen performances, but he was twice nominated, in 1941 for *Penny Serenade*, and again in 1944 for *None But The Lonely Heart*. He had that unique ability to play the fool, and sometimes the idiot, without ever surrendering his image of the handsome, idealistic charmer.

After filming *Walk, Don't Run* in 1966, Grant decided to quit the silver screen. He had spent 34 years as a movie actor. He made his debut in a 'short' titled *Singapore Sue* in 1932. Changing his name from Archibald Alex Leach to Cary Grant, he made seven movies in his first year in Hollywood. Mae West chose him as her leading man in *She Done Him Wrong*, after spotting him walking across a studio backlot. "If he can talk, I want him," she is reported as having said. The movie changed Grant's fortunes. Soon, he was the man every prominent actress in Hollywood wanted to work with.

In 1942 he became an American citizen, but his ties with England remained as strong as ever. He had travelled to America for the first time in 1920 as a member of the Pender Troupe, a group specialising in eccentric dancing, stilt-walking, clowning, and pantomime. He joined them when he was 14, after running away from home at the end of the First World War.

The happy-go-lucky character he played on screen was often at odds with the private man behind the legendary image. He once said, "Everyone tells me I've had such an interesting life, but sometimes I think it's been nothing but stomach disturbances and self-concern."

He married five times. First to Virginia Cherrill in London in 1934. After their divorce, he married Barbara Hutton in 1942. They divorced in 1945. On Christmas Day, 1949, he married actress Betsy Drake, but this lengthier marriage ended in divorce in 1962. Three years later he and actress Dyan Cannon were married. In 1966, the year Cary made his last film, Dyan gave birth to Cary's first and only child, a daughter named Jennifer. Two years later Cary and Dyan were divorced.

In 1976 he met a hotel public relations girl, Barbara Harris, in London. They eventually married, and their many years together were very happy. Close friends often remarked how Barbara had got Cary to open up, and to enjoy the social scene again. One of his closest friends, journalist and author, Roderick Mann, recalled spending a day at the races with Grant just a few days before he died. "He was in fine form, laughing a lot and telling outrageous jokes," wrote Mann. "One of them had as its tag a play on the words of 'I Left My Heart in San Francisco', with a man telling St. Peter, 'I left my harp in Sam Frank's disco'. He loved that one."

Mann also revealed that Grant's home in Beverly Hills was full of books containing jokes, stories and quotes. These and other memorabilia, were kept in a special fireproof room, and indexed.

A great and well-loved star has now passed on, but his rich legacy of 72 films, remain for future generations to enjoy. Cary Grant, I suspect, is rather pleased about that.

**Video Collection have released a selection of Cary Grant films at the budget price of £6.99, available at high street outlets. Titles include *Gunga Din*; *Operation Petticoat*; *Indiscreet*; *That Touch of Mink*; *The Grass is Greener*; *Notorious*; *Bringing Up Baby* and *Sylvia Scarlett*.**